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29. — *Last Poems of ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.* With a Memorial, by THEODORE TILTON. New York: James Miller. 1862. 16mo. pp. 242.

MOST of these poems were left in manuscript by the author. Some of them are among the best of her minor poems. Several have that union of masculine vigor with the profoundest womanly tenderness, which we could trace more and more in the last years of her life, and which marked the culmination of her powers. We have so recently discoursed at length on the peculiar traits of her genius, that little now remains which we should wish to add. Mr. Tilton's "Memorial" is a warmly appreciative and at the same time a discriminating essay on her character and poems, and especially on her character as illustrated by her poems.

30. — *A Dictionary of English Etymology.* By HENSLEIGH WEDGWOOD, M. A., Late Fellow of Christ College, Cambridge. Volume I. (A-D.) With Notes and Additions, by GEORGE P. MARSH. New York: Sheldon & Co. 1862. 8vo. pp. 247.

THIS is a dictionary, not to be consulted, but to be read through both for delight and for instruction. It is one of the most fascinating books of the time. We can best define it by terming it a biographical dictionary of words. *Biographical* we say; for words have life, and sometimes they die before the language to which they belong; and while they live, they move, they drop and take on significations, they are called to new services with the growth or modification of science, art, and social refinement. Conversely, the biography of words embodies large and momentous sections of human history. How much, for instance, is told by the contrast between the Latin *privilegium* and the English *privilege*, the former capable of a bad sense [a *priva lex* against an individual], as when Cicero complains of the demolition of his house as a *privilegium*, — the latter indicating that Christian civilization, whatever it may do, will *recognize* exceptions only in favor of individuals! How much of spiritual history is comprehended in the fact that Tertullian, the Christian, was the first writer known to have used *tribulatio* to denote affliction, thus marking the advent into Christian consciousness of the *threshing* ministry for God's wheat of what were previously regarded only as burdens and sorrows! Of such items of history the volume now before us is full. The English author must have made these inquiries the study of a lifetime, and the additions by our learned countryman are such as we should have anticipated from his previous labors in this department. Were

the reconstruction of our orthography on phonographic principles possible, which it is not, and were it on other grounds expedient, a sufficient and conclusive objection would be found in the bearing which it would have on the history of thought. It is our silent letters and our anomalous combinations of letters that connect our words with their origin, and make them waymarks of the progress of our race.

We notice very few of the words in this volume, to whose treatment we could take exception; but there are one or two with regard to which we are inclined, not without diffidence, to dissent from the author. One of these is the word *assess*, of which he writes:—

“To Assess. The Lat. *assidere*, *assessum*, to sit down, was used in Middle Lat. in an active sense for to set, to impose a tax; *assidere talliam*; in Fr. [French] *asseoir la taille*, to fix a certain amount upon each individual.”

We are inclined to derive our sense of *assess* from one of the senses of *assidere*, to sit by. In a tribunal, while the principal judge was occupied wholly in his judicial functions, it fell to the lot of his *by-sitters*, or side-judges, to manage the financial concerns of the court, to determine costs, fines, and damages, and to apportion the rates to be paid for the public service. From the position of these men as *assessors*, their distinguishing office came to be designated by the corresponding verb *assess*.

Of *calamity* our author says:—

“Calamity. Lat. *calamitas*, loss, misfortune. Perhaps from W. [Welsh] *col*, loss, whence Lat. *incolumis*, without loss, safe.”

Is not this word more probably derived from *calamus*, a reed, and is there not reference to the reed broken by the wind? Bacon derives it from *calamus*, a stalk, and says that it denotes the blighted condition in which the corn cannot “get out of the stalk,” so that the unhappy cultivator has only the stalk for his harvest,—a *calamity* indeed.

We doubt whether the whole story is told in the following:—

“Dint. — Dent. — Dunt. All imitative of the sound of a blow. To *dunt*, to strike so as to make a hollow sound, to beat, to palpitate. — Jam. Icel. [Icelandic] *dyntr*, *dynt*, shaking up and down; *dynkr*, a hollow sound, as when a stone is thrown into the water; Sw. [Swedish] *dunka*, to beat heavily. Sc. [Scotch] to *dump*, to beat or strike with the feet. Sw. *dimpa*, to fall.”

We cannot but think that *dint*, *dent*, and *dunt* are connected in their origin with *dens*, *dentis*, and denote, primarily, a *tooth-mark*.

These doubts, to which we might add a few others, we propose, not by way of fault-finding, but barely as specimens of the fruitful questionings which it is one of the offices of such a book to raise.